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ABSTRACT

The major premise of this paper is that the values clarification approach to moral issues is a form of doublespeak based on flawed thinking. Following an examination of examples of doublespeak, the paper discusses the concept of subjectivity in "Teaching As a Subversive Activity," by N. Postman and C. Weingartner, arguing that their claim that "all judgments are subjective" is conceptually confused. It then analyzes the writings of proponents of the values clarification approach to show that the approach is based on the thesis of moral subjectivity--that there are no right or wrong answers; that whatever people want is right for them--but that in practice the moral intuitions of these proponents propel them in a different, conflicting direction. It also argues that the values clarification method appears to be a way of avoiding moral issues rather than of tackling them, notes that the refusal to accept moral language on its own terms is characteristic of much contemporary writing aimed at teachers, and points to inconsistencies in such writings that suggest serious flaws in the theories that generate them. It concludes that subjectivism is unacceptable and incoherent and that the main problem with the values clarification approach is not that it makes a number of moral mistakes but that it lacks a mastery of the conceptual structure of the language in which such mistakes are possible. (GT)

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Values Clarification: A Case of Doublespeak

Robert L. Caldwell

Doublespeak is now a familiar and almost fashionable part of American life. Mortuaries have "slumber" rooms where bodies are laid out prior to burial, automobile dealers sell "previously-owned" cars, and all of us can speak and understand Pentagonese to some degree. In all these examples the common element is deception; one expression is substituted for another, where the original states a fact and the other tenderizes it. But the intent of doublespeak (or of euphemism, at any rate) is not always the same. Sometimes an expression is changed in order to lessen suffering, sometimes to persuade a person to buy, and sometimes to move the reluctant to act. But in all cases doublespeak conceals or partly conceals the nature of reality from us.

Need doublespeak be deliberate deception? Suppose a mortician were convinced that death is just another form of sleep. Would he then be innocent of mis-using language merely because he is ignorant of the facts of life and death? In this case, a confusion about the meaning of the term "sleeping" masquerades as a discovery about the nature of death, but all the rest of it -- the intended response to a new "reality," which is the essence of doublespeak -- remains the same. The only difference between the two lies in the reason for changing expressions; both mislead but only the one is deliberate. The other is intended to reveal certain new "facts" about death, that the dead are really asleep in some fashion or other, and to guide us appropriately in respect to them.

A more extended example of this second kind of doublespeak, where the intended action is not harmless or inconsequential but just the opposite, can be found in a book entitled Teaching as a Subversive Activity by Postman and Weingartner. In this book, the authors tell us that since reality is a "perception located somewhere behind the eyes," the best that we can do is say how something appears to us, not how it really is. Thus, since we have no perceptual world in common, the grammatical categories we often use have no real application

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to it. Though we may be tempted to call someone stupid or to make an objective judgment about a poem, the fact is that "stupid" is a distinction holding only in language and that objectivity is forever beyond our reach; there are only degrees of subjectivity and nothing more.¹

Once these "facts" are known, the authors go on to say, the implications for conduct are clear: The schools will see the need (or perhaps ought to see it) to change their educational tactics and goals. No longer will teachers be permitted or even inclined to grade a student's "perception of reality" because the essential subjectivity of all judgments would finally be apparent even to them. When we make the reality we perceive, as Postman and Weingartner say we do, the practice of grading, which depends upon a common world and a shared truth about it, is simply out of place. In fact, given that subjectivism is true, the whole educational establishment as we know it is seriously undermined.

Because a theory has certain undesirable consequences, however, is not by itself sufficient to condemn it as doublespeak. It could be a factual discovery about the nature of the perceived world and thus Postman and Weingartner's recommendations about teaching and the schools could very well be true. For obviously if we never perceive the real world at all, we have no business making any judgments about it, least of all judgments that are critical of other people. But like the ignorant mortician just mentioned, Postman and Weingartner offer little or no evidence in favor of their view, apparently convinced that none is required. Presumably they think that evidence could be found to support the thesis of universal subjectivity while the belief that death is just another form of sleep is neither true nor false but senseless; the mortician simply doesn't know how to use the term "death" properly.

On the other hand, if this thesis is a conceptual confusion, then the nature of the perceptual world is not more clearly revealed by it but hidden, just as the facts of death are hidden by the label "sleep." And if we continue to act as though it were a factual discovery, we are in effect responding to a euphemism.

The critical question, then, is the status of the theory. If the claim "All judgments are subjective" is conceptually confused, as I suspect it is, then Teaching as a Subversive Activity is also a paradigm of doublespeak and deserves to be treated as such.

But how do we tell whether this claim is meaningful or not? One way is to see how or why it came to be made. When Postman and Weingartner locate reality behind the eyes they apparently are being influenced by investigations into the physiology of the visual nervous system. We don't see objects until light from the object enters the eye, impinges on the retina, passes through the optic nerve, and finally comes to rest in the occipital lobe of the brain. All seeing of external objects is like this. It therefore follows, Postman and Weingartner seem to suggest, that we never see external objects at all; we see events in the brain, and our ordinary distinction between objective and subjective seeing is simply cast aside as factually false. But clearly, the conclusion that we don't see the real world because we have investigated and found out the truth about part of it doesn't follow. We can't find out anything about the world around us if this conclusion is true, and it is only because we do make some factual discoveries about it that the conclusion is drawn at all. But if the investigations are true which seem to imply that reality is behind the eyes, then this implication must be false. Therefore it is either unsupported or false. But false how? It would take us too far afield to answer this question in sufficient and convincing detail, but consider the ordinary distinction between objective and subjective seeing which Postman and Weingartner seek to abolish. Their point is that all seeing and therefore all judgments (of perception at any rate) are subjective, that our ordinary way of talking is simply not warranted by the facts and is therefore false. What is this ordinary way of talking? Well, a judgment of perception is subjective when it deviates from the norm, when the conditions of perception are abnormal in some way. And an objective judgment is simply one that is made under normal conditions by a person with normal vision. The term "subjective", therefore, makes sense only in a context in which "objective" also has a use. Not all seeing can be subjective because not all seeing can deviate; "deviate"

means "departing from a norm", and the norm must exist in some sense before anything can deviate from it. Thus the claim that all judgments are subjective is conceptually confused because it is saying that all judgments have a property which, logically, is possible only for some.

Postman and Weingartner's contribution to the delinquency of language, then, takes the same form as that of the mortician who thinks that death is a novel form of sleep. All three confuse a conceptual mistake with a factual discovery and urge us to act in accordance with that confusion. In this case, the mistake is to think that we make the reality we perceive and thus cannot evaluate anyone else's perception of it because we don't share it with him. But of course the differences between these contributions to confusion are as significant as the similarities. For the mortician sugar-coats only a portion of reality while Postman and Weingartner conceal the whole of it behind the "facade" of ordinary speech. The latter don't hide an unpleasant fact behind a euphemism which eventually wears thin but argue that language as a whole is incapable in principle of describing reality as it is. If language applies only to that portion of the real which lies somewhere behind the eyes, then our words have no connection with the ordinary world. What we say, therefore, has no objective truth or validity at all. Whether this is doublespeak in the traditional sense may be argued, of course, but that it is a confusion which attempts to influence teaching in a radical way can hardly be denied.

A more influential example of the same kind of general confusion is the Values Clarification approach to moral issues. While almost no one takes the thesis of universal subjectivity seriously, a great many people do regard the language of morals as a subjective response to an objective state of affairs. Goodness and beauty both lie in the eye of the beholder. When they find a theory which coincides with their own intuitions about the matter, therefore, they accept it gladly and take it to be gospel. Admittedly the Values

Clarification people do not argue for the thesis of moral subjectivity but apart from a "minor" deviation dismissed by Louis Rath, the pioneer of Values Clarification,² as inconsequential, this is what the theory comes to nevertheless. We try to get clear about our values, on this view, because we want to make rational decisions and choices, at least in areas of vital concern to us. And a choice is rational only if it is guided by the highest desire in a valuational hierarchy. We are reasonable, in other words, if we know what our most pressing wants are and act to satisfy them. But what is rational for one person, of course, might not be rational for another since their values presumably differ; but both of them can still be rational in their own way. What their values actually are, however, is not always clear even to themselves. Hence their choices (and ours) are occasionally irrational in the sense that we act on the basis of a secondary desire. In selecting food in a restaurant, for example, we may not know what we really want and act on whim alone. If we make a mistake as a consequence we not only suffer from it to a certain extent but our action in so choosing is unreasonable. That is why teachers are so important to us; we need their help in setting our values straight.

In a handbook of value clarification strategies, Simon makes his version of subjectivism clear.³ Teachers may reveal their own valuational hierarchy to their classes as an item of information, but they do not try to impose it on them -- or at least they ought not do so. Why shouldn't they? Because "... the particular content of (their) values holds no more weight than anyone else's".³ We try to clarify our values on this theory, not because there is a real possibility of moral improvement here but because (again) the process is supposed to lead to wiser decision making and to more reasonable problem solving. Suppose a couple wants to live together before marriage, for example, in order to find out whether they are "compatible" or not. Should they do so? Well, it all depends on what their values are. If they value the diminishing weight of

public opinion more than they value the immediate, non-legal sexual gratification that living together usually brings, they would be wiser to live apart. If not, not. What they cannot do and still be rational, on this view, is solicit the advice of others on any moral question at all since the latter have nothing to offer here except the litany of their own value preferences. If no judgment of objective rights and wrongs is possible, then all so-called moral decisions must be left to the people themselves, and what counts as wisdom in the management of their practical affairs is acting in accordance with their own strongest desires.

That this is the principal philosophical import of Simon's book is obvious from even a casual reading of it. On page 14, for example, he tells us that ideally "our choices will be made on the basis of the values we hold, but frequently we are not clear about our own values." On page 30, "... before we can go about living the good life, we must know what it is we value and want." On 131, "... both the teacher and the students must learn to respect each others right to hold different values and to act in accordance with their different convictions." And on page 377, "There really is no right answer (to the question "Who is most blameworthy?" even in a specific situation). The major reason for discussing such problem situations is to become clear about what we seem to value."

Supposing this theory were accepted, how would it translate into action? Given all of our beliefs, feelings, and values related to a certain situation, Simon asks, ideally what would we want to do? Suppose the situation were this: A 19 year old male high school sophomore believes that women are naturally inferior to men, especially women who teach English, and values a variety of sexual encounters above everything else. What would he want to do if his English teacher was young, attentive, attractive, and living alone? Whatever his answer might in fact be, the path of wisdom on this view is clearly to get to "know" her better even if she resists. As long as the act of "knowing" is

not habitual, not coerced (nobody is forcing him), freely chosen, and a consequence of the highest desire in his valuational hierarchy, it is right "for him." And if the teacher happens to value her own integrity more than she does the student's desires and tries to resist, she will need to be reminded that her values merit respect only if the student's right to hold different views and to act in accordance with them are respected in the same way. We cannot maintain in theory what we deny in practice. And since there are no right or wrong answers here anyway, the act of rape is really doing the teacher a favor; it helps her clarify her own values in a dramatic and personal way. If the major reason for discussing problem situations is to become clearer about what we seem to value, as Simon says it is (377), then how much greater clarity will be achieved through action.

In a later book co-authored by Sally Wendkos Olds, Simon's message remains substantially the same.⁴ Although this book promises to help parents help their children learn right from wrong, the authors tell us that "the essence of Values Clarification is the need for each person to work out his or her own right answers." (p. 158.) And to the question, "What answers are right here?" the predictable reply is "None of them." "There are no right or wrong answers, attitudes, or responses. Whatever way a person feels is valid for him." (43) A parent can teach his children the difference between right and wrong, then, only by helping them discover what they really want and to assist them in translating this belief into action. The child is virtuous only when he acts in accordance with his own strongest desires. But what he believes, of course, as Simon explicitly says in his earlier book is irrelevant to the question of its rightness. The Values Clarification approach to answering moral questions is not concerned with the content of people's values but only with the process of valuing. The important questions are not what people believe but how they believe it, i.e., are they happy with it, do they really want it, and so on.⁵ The moral

worth of the high school drug pusher, mugger, or rapist cannot be determined by what he does, therefore, but only by the spirit with which he does it. If he rapes a teacher just to gain the approval of a school-board member of his own peer group, he is morally blame-worthy (or what passes for moral blameworthiness on this theory); but if he is a sexual entrepreneur acting on his own volition, he is behaving properly no matter what he does.

Values Clarification is of course not really this simple or simple-minded, for even Simon comes to admit (as Rathes did before him) that not all behavior can be tolerated. Stealing is wrong, for example, whether someone values it or not, and people can and ought to be restrained from hurting themselves or others.⁶ We are also told that grading is "a pernicious academic institution" (124) that should be abolished. But these wrongs (if they are wrongs) are clearly not wrong within the confines of the theory, but are maxims that all right-thinking people would presumably accept as a matter of course. Yet Simon still claims to provide us with "all the tools (we) need to tackle any issue," (p. 171) including this one. But clearly what the theory says is inconsistent with these ad lib pronouncements; the theory is too narrow even for its own practitioners. Louis Rathes also feels the sting of this confinement when he says that teachers should not tolerate behavior detrimental to other students even though the student freely chooses to act in that way. But Rathes passes off this discrepancy between theory and practice as a "semantic riddle of little consequence." (p. 227) Obviously, however, it is nothing of the sort. The point is, rather, that both Rathes and Simon are operating under two different "moral" systems at the same time. They are committed to values-clarification in theory while in practice their own moral intuitions sometimes propel them in a different and conflicting direction. They cannot say that stealing in general is wrong and still maintain that no answers, attitudes, or responses can ever be right. These claims are simply inconsistent with one another. Yet we find Simon and Rathes determinedly

committed to both views at the same time, nevertheless.

Aside from this rather blatant contradiction, does the Values Clarification method supply us with all the tools we need to tackle any issue? The best way of answering this question is to let the method speak for itself. Under the heading of provocative questions, Simon asks us to imagine the following situation: A married woman desperately wants to cross an alligator-infested river, but the only ferry available is operated by a lecherous old man who will satisfy her want only if she satisfies his, i.e., only if she agrees to sleep with him. What should she do -- or more precisely, how does the Values Clarification approach help her (or you) to guide her actions properly? The answer is characteristically simple. We let the woman decide for herself, making sure of course that she is acting in accordance with her own strongest desires. And what she does in this way is right no matter what it is as long as she really wants to do it -- or wants the alternative less. Suppose she doesn't value marital fidelity very highly but hungers after the gold she found in a claim she is trying to file. Is she justified in committing adultery because she prefers the gold and this is the only way to get it? The answer is obviously "Yes," from Simon's point of view, because "justified" means "doing what one really wants to do in any particular set of circumstances," and clearly the woman is doing what she wants. The solution of this or any other moral problem has therefore nothing to do with the situation in which people find themselves and with the obligations incurred therein but only with finding out the relative position of wants or desires in their valuational hierarchies. Only this determines whether what they do is justified or not.

Put in this way, The Values Clarification method looks more like a way of avoiding moral issues than of tackling them. For surely though wants can sometimes move us to act they can hardly guide us properly or distinguish between other wants that ought to be satisfied and those that should be curbed. Nor can the moral question "What ought I do in such and such circumstances?" be

reduced to the psychological "What do I really want to do here?" without losing its moral sense. Yet this is the only way that Simon can understand normative claims, and he takes this inability to be an insight into their essential nature. What is wrong, of course, and this is the irony of Values Clarification, is that the theory not only fails to provide us with all the tools we need to settle moral issues but it deprives us of those we already have. We cannot even understand a moral issue as moral, on this theory, much less solve it, because the conceptual apparatus needed for such understanding has already been eliminated by the theory itself. In interpreting moral concepts in terms of wants and desires, Values Clarification tackles normative issues by changing them into something else entirely. One might as well think that all problems in the game of Bridge can be resolved by appealing to the rules of Chess.

This refusal to accept moral language on its own terms is characteristic of a good deal of contemporary writing aimed at English teachers in particular and at the teaching profession in general. In some cases moral terms are explicitly repudiated in favor of a more "objective" kind of discourse, while in others the rejection is only implicit. But both feel the need in unguarded moments to use what they have elsewhere emphatically denied. In a book by Canfield and Wells, to take one example of such writing, the rejection is made explicit.⁷ Here the authors recommend that a value-free discourse be used in describing student activities because it is "more realistic, more scientific, and less damaging to students." The evaluative "you're bad" ought to be replaced by the valuationally neutral "You hit a boy yesterday," for only the latter states a fact. The former merely expresses disapproval of the act but does not describe it. Ann Landers' use of the abominable term "sexually-active teenager" is another instance of the same attitude of mind and shows how widespread the practice is.

Canfield and Wells also go on to assert that we should not get locked into "shoulds" or "oughts", presumably because that too is unrealistic. But then we find

them saying that a student's self-concept cannot grow unless he has the opportunity publicly to affirm the things he believes in and to have his beliefs respected by others. "True personal growth," we are told, "happens when the person follows his immediate striving for a greater ideal, not when he feels driven by "shoulds." (p. 178) But what a greater ideal is here is defined solely in terms of wants: "Your goal should be something you really want to do. Whatever your ambition, it should be one that you want to fulfill, rather than something you feel you should do." (p. 189)

Aside from the fact that this reduction of ideals to wants makes no sense of what we normally take an ideal of conduct to be, the sentence in which the admonition is put is itself an instance of the kind of language that we are here urged to ignore. And what of the student's self-concept that can grow only if his beliefs are respected by others? Does a teacher have an obligation to help build this image which he doesn't have if he prefers not to meet it? Can the student's self-concept grow, in fact, in the environment that Canfield and Wells provide? It is true of course that a student's image of himself will not improve if he is constantly thought to be stupid, dull, or uninteresting. He needs the respect of others in order to gain in self-respect. But the plain fact is that he won't get it on this theory, and teachers who try to grant it will automatically fail to do their duty. What sort of self-image will be created in the student if the teacher respects his every opinion no matter how inane, and how in fact could the teacher responsibly do it? Respect is not something that can be created by an act of will, nor is the student likely to profit by it if everything he says gets the same treatment. Some behavior is respected or worthy of respect only because some other is not, and even the dullest student will eventually come to see that universal "respect", no matter how faulty or trivial the object, is merely a sham. Would a teacher be

doing his duty and building the right kind of self-concept, moreover, if he responded to student opinion as Canfield and Wells say he should? How is he supposed to teach if not by correcting student mistakes? And what of the teacher's own self-concept? Would it be enhanced by this kind of indiscriminate respect paying? Finally, if the expression "I'm bad" is unrealistic and unscientific and ought to be replaced by a more "objective" description of behavior, then why wouldn't the same apply to "I'm worthy" which Canfield and Wells think very highly of, indeed? Why not just state the "facts" whatever they are and let it go at that -- that I feel good about myself, for example, because my teacher always responds to me (and to everyone else) in the same way and because I never do anything that I don't want to do. Whatever "specific behavior" I want to try out, whether it be to demand a smoking room for students or to insult the teacher, I simply do. The point is that "I'm bad" and "I'm worthy" stand or fall together; if one is unrealistic and unscientific than so is the other. Canfield and Wells want to improve the self-image of students, in other words, but they deny legitimacy to the language in which alone such improvement can properly be expressed and evaluated.

What is wrong with these theories is that all of them regard the language of morals on a subjective response to an objective state of affairs. With the exception of Postman and Weingartner, they all seem to agree that we may see red as an objective property of the world but we never see "shoulds" and "rights" at all; we only feel them. This language, therefore, ought to be purged of its objective pretensions or else eliminated entirely. Either we accept the Values Clarification account of moral discourse, in other words, or we follow Canfield and Wells. Thus when we speak about values as a consequence of adopting subjectivism we must be speaking of what we in fact value,

and the distinction between what is actually valued and what is worthy of being valued no longer has significance. We try, in other words, to make sense of ordinary moral terms and moral distinctions in a radically different way, as having something essentially to do with wants and desires. We can still talk about "shoulds" and "oughts", as Simon does, but we have to understand that what we ought to do here is what we really want to do. Given this theory, what else could it be? For Canfield and Wells, on the other hand, these locutions ought to be expunged from the English language entirely. Wants alone remain as the only reliable guide to conduct and "oughts" and "shoulds" in theory are relegated to the linguistic attic. Yet Canfield and Wells and the Values Clarification people both continue to use these terms in their ordinary sense whenever they try to give ad lib moral advice or to explicate their own theories. Canfield and Wells are quite bald about it, in fact. In a quotation already cited they try in a self-defeating way to tell students what they should do, that is, to ignore all "shoulds," including this one presumably, and follow wants instead. And the Values Clarification people are equally insouciant about consistency when they tell teachers to refrain from imposing their own values on students. Apparently the value of non-imposition has or ought to have a superior place in everyone's valuational hierarchy whether it actually does so or not. This at any rate is one of Simon's values which he would like to see implemented on a large scale.

Inconsistencies are not themselves instances of doublespeak, of course, but they do suggest a serious flaw in the theories that generate them. The real question here is not so much that inconsistencies occur but why they do so. And the answer is that subjectivism is both unacceptable and incoherent; neither we nor its advocates can make sense of moral discourse on the terms it sets. For the theory tells us again that we are to understand ordinary moral discourse either as a disguised way of talking about wants and desires or as an expendable

item that functions as an obstacle to understanding rather than as a condition. Thus when we normally offer reasons to justify a certain course of action as right, we are really speaking of what we want. Every effort to convince an opponent that he has an obligation to support the E.R.A. or something comparable, therefore, is not only a waste of time but a case of deception in reverse. The "facts" expressed and expressible in this discourse have no legitimacy; there is no rational way of settling these matters, no truth to be obtained here, no justifications to be given, no obligations to be discovered and fulfilled, no rights or wrongs, and in fact no such thing as moral agreement or disagreement. When we seem to disagree on an issue what is actually going on (despite appearances to the contrary) is that one person is expressing approval while the other disapproves of it: "I value it" does not disagree with the claim "You don't." There is nothing here, in short, but wants, wants, and more wants. The wise man is therefore not the one who knows the good and acts accordingly but the person, as Simon says, who knows what he wants and has the wherewithal to get it. And the common expression "I don't want to pay my debts but think I should" (which makes perfectly good sense ordinarily) is reduced to the contradiction "I don't want to pay my debts, but I really do want to do it." That this is not a contribution to better understanding is hardly an overstatement.

Other examples of the widening gap between what we say and what we seem to mean by it (on Simon's view, at any rate) can easily be found. When the President of Egypt seeks to regain territory lost to Israel in the recent war, he talks of reasons, justifications, and rights and is answered in the same vein. Is it right to keep territory taken by force, the Egyptians ask, and the Israelites answer "Yes, when the safety of the victors is at stake." It may be that Egypt wants the Sinai back as much as Israel wants to keep it, but their wants play no part in the argument itself. They don't justify the

demand, though they do explain why it is issued. Imagine a negotiator for Egypt, in this connection, arguing on the basis of wants alone. "You ought to return the Sinai to us," he begins, but to the question "Why should we?" has nothing to offer but the irrelevant "Because we want it." But obviously the same "justification" could be given for any obligation statement whatever, and since the want "justifies" everything, it justifies nothing at all. The trouble with it, of course, is that wants are not reasons, and to reduce one to the other is to declare linguistic and moral bankruptcy. Reasons are public in the sense that they are neither mine nor yours but ours; if a statement is a reason for anyone it is a reason for everyone in the same circumstances. That this man is my father, for example, is not a reason which applies to me alone but to anyone operating under the same conditions. Wants, on the other hand, are private and personal, either yours or mine, but even if a want were shared by everyone it would still not be a reason because it doesn't function like one. If a want has any function at all it is to report how things are in one's mind or body, where the satisfaction of the want produces equilibrium. But the function of a reason is to warrant a claim as true or to provide us with a ground for acting in one way rather than another. Certainly it is possible to want something for no reason at all and to give good reasons for doing what we don't want to do. We are all familiar with fact that we don't always want to meet our obligations, though we still have good reasons for satisfying them nonetheless. The point is, as we know perfectly well in practice, that people who confuse wants with reasons and think that the only proper answer to the question "What ought I to do" is "What do you want?" are cases of arrested moral development. Normally we quite easily distinguish between the two soon after we leave childhood.

What I am suggesting, of course, is that this is also the case with the Values-Clarification movement and with its advocates; the theory never gets

beyond the infantile level of moral understanding. Just as Postman and Weingartner's "discovery" that reality lies somewhere behind the eyes makes no sense of ordinary factual discourse, so Simon's acceptance of subjectivism makes no sense of normative discourse as we normally use it. Instead of disclosing the nature of moral reality more clearly to us, this theory effectively conceals it from view. A comparable situation would be the attempt to clarify the game of Bridge by completely changing the rules, by playing it, for example, in accordance with the rules of Chess. The reality of Bridge would obviously be destroyed if this attempted "clarification" were carried out. The move called "reneging" in Bridge is not made clearer by treating it as a special form of castling. Just the opposite in fact is true. Analogously, to treat moral reasons as disguised wants is not to give us a better understanding of the use of moral reasons in justifying conduct but to destroy the possibility of moral reasoning at all. Yet this is precisely what Simon, perhaps unwittingly, tries to do. In both instances, in Postman and Weingartner as well as in Simon, a conceptual confusion masquerades as a factual discovery to which we are asked to respond appropriately, in one case by destroying the schools as we know them and in the other by repudiating morality entirely. How these programs differ (except in degree and seriousness) from simple euphemisms is thus difficult to see. For the function of both is to move us to act in light of newly-discovered "facts" about the world.

But why does Simon accept a theory having such undesirable consequences? He doesn't say, but one common reason for doing so is that since scientific or empirical judgments are objective, normative judgments must be subjective. After all, science does discover many facts about the world, but the existence of values is not one of them. So we need not look at the way moral discourse actually functions in ordinary life or in what sense it is objective; the point is that if it is not objective in the scientific sense, it is not objective at all. We need not take it seriously on its own terms. What we do need to do, rather,

the suggestion is, is to clarify the concepts of this discourse by imposing a standard of objectivity on it that it logically cannot satisfy. And the fact that this imposition clarifies nothing only shows how "confused" we really are. In any case this imposition is the source and substance of Simon's doublespeak.

In summary, my objection to the Values Clarification approach to moral issues (and to Canfield and Wells whom I regard as a variation of Values Clarification) is not that it makes a number of moral mistakes but rather that it doesn't have a mastery of the conceptual structure of the language in which such mistakes are possible. It went wrong because Simon apparently thinks that scientific discourse is objective and therefore that the language of morals must be subjective; all the rest follows from this initial mistake. And that it is a conceptual confusion is shown by the fact that we cannot understand the way we ordinarily talk about morality in the context of this theory. Any answer to the question "What ought I to do?" given solely in terms of what I want to do is not a moral discovery but a case of arrested moral development. And a person with such an affliction is no more capable of making a moral mistake than the average man is capable of making factual mistakes in ancient Greek. He just doesn't understand the language. Similarly, a child who calls all women "mother" does not have a deeper insight into the nature of motherhood than the rest of us possess but is demonstrating his incompetence in the use of a term. A factual mistake here would be confusing one's own mother with somebody else, and such mistakes presuppose that at least the word "mother" is used correctly. So it is also with the language of morals. Whatever its structure may be, at least this much is clear: when we discuss moral issues in practice and try to convince others of the rightness of our views, we are not talking about wants and desires but are offering reasons to justify the claims made. Our reasons may sometimes not be good enough, of course, but if Simon is right we can never reason morally at all. Reason simply has no place in the guidance of our practical affairs.

And he says this because he is not willing to accept moral discourse on its own terms. He wants, rather, to impose a criterion of objectivity on the structure of this discourse which is not its own and then try to understand our ordinary ways of speaking in the "light" thus shed. What Simon takes to be a discovery about the nature and purpose of moral inquiry, therefore, is just a conceptual confusion or the result of a confusion. And when this confusion is translated into action, as Simon intends it to be, the effect is moral disaster. Why, one might ask, are the schools becoming more and more violent? The answer, in part, is that we are teaching violence as a form of moral enlightenment. We tell students, in effect, to do what they want as long as they really want it, and we urge those in authority to respect the actions thus performed as examples of moral wisdom -- or else we try to rid the language of those elements which make moral judgments possible at all. To accept Values Clarification as a way of resolving moral issues in short is to invite disaster and in most cases to get it. Simon's theory is no more capable of answering the hard moral questions that sometimes plague us than the euphemism "He is only sleeping" is capable of raising the dead. Both have the effect of concealing the real facts from us, the one deliberately deceptive, the other accidentally. But since no one really believes that the "sleeping" room of a mortuary is a place to take a nap, while Values Clarification is widely taken to be a moral break-through, it is time that its real character is revealed. Like the euphemism, it is doublespeak pure and simple, and the sooner we get rid of it the better.

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